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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 001597

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CCA, WHA/CEN, DRL/IL, DRL/PHD, AND INR/B

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/19/2014

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM ELAB CU HO ILO

SUBJECT: GOH, BUT NOT HONDURAN CIVIL SOCIETY, OPEN TO SUPPORTING CUBAN CIVIL SOCIETY; MFA NAMES NEW CHARGE FOR EMBASSY IN HAVANA

REF: A. STATE 152813

¶B. STATE 153312

¶C. TEGUCIGALPA 1461

¶D. TEGUCIGALPA 793

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Derrick Olsen;
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) As noted in ref C, the GOH has actively worked to advance democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms in Cuba. On April 15, the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) passed a Honduran-drafted resolution calling for greater respect for human rights in Cuba. The Government of Cuba (GOC) responded to the GOH's action by suspending pending maritime boundary negotiations with Honduras, something that has been a foreign policy priority of President Ricardo Maduro's administration. Also, while the GOH does have formal diplomatic relations with Cuba, Honduras has not named an Ambassador to Cuba, partly out of deference to U.S. wishes. However, the GOH consistently and publicly states that concern over Cuba's human rights policies is a fundamental tenet of its policy toward the Castro regime.

¶2. (SBU) The MFA publicly announced that Humberto Lopez Villamil, currently the DCM at the Honduran Embassy in Quito, had been appointed as the new Charge d'Affaires in Havana. He will replace the current Charge, Reinieri Amador. PolOffs will try to meet with Lopez to stress the importance of supporting Cuban civil society in late July or early August after he leaves Ecuador and comes to Honduras prior to taking his post in Havana.

¶3. (C) Note: MFA Director General (DG) Mario Fortin had told PolCouns earlier that this announcement was coming. A 22-year career officer, Lopez Villamil may also be promoted to rank of career Ambassador, but Honduran representation in Havana will not be elevated. End Note.

¶4. (SBU) In general, Honduran nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) do not share the same willingness as the GOH to advocate human and labor rights in Cuba. As noted in ref D, many NGO and union leaders were highly critical of the GOH's drafting of the UNCHR resolution on Cuba. The most common argument made by critics was that the GOH is in no position to criticize another country due to the serious human rights problems in Honduras, especially extrajudicial killings. Even Catholic Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez made a veiled statement along these lines. Other arguments made by critics include castigating the GOH for criticizing a country that has been helpful since Hurricane Mitch hit in 1998 by providing doctors and educating medical students, and calling the GOH a U.S. lackey, among others.

¶5. (C) Some NGOs are thought to receive financing or other assistance from the GOC. Many NGOs and some unions in Honduras are also ideologically predisposed not to criticize the GOC, despite the fact that their ability to voice opinions critical of the GOH is a freedom Cubans do not enjoy. A possible exception is Andres Pavon, President of the human rights NGO CODEH, and a recent IVP grantee. During the controversy in March/April over the UNCHR Cuba resolution, Pavon told PolOff privately that, unlike most NGO leaders taking public stands criticizing the GOH, he supported the GOH drafting a UNCHR resolution on Cuba. He agreed with his NGO colleagues that there is much to criticize about the GOH's human rights record, but said that did not preclude the GOH from drafting a resolution that criticized a country with clear human rights abuses. Post notes that two labor confederations, CTH and CUTH, are affiliated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), and might be willing to support ICFTU calls for labor rights in Cuba. Post is not aware of any prominent Honduran labor leader having criticized the lack of labor rights in Cuba in the last couple years.

¶6. (C) Comment: Post believes that, while gun-shy of another public confrontation with the GOC, the GOH will continue to emphasize the importance of human rights in Cuba. A new Charge in Havana will give the GOH a chance to focus on supporting Cuban civil society as well. Unfortunately, Post has not seen any prominent Honduran NGO or labor leader take

a public position critical of the GOC or strongly supportive of Cuban civil society. As such, Post is not very optimistic that a Honduran civil society leader would be willing to publicly stand up for Cuban human and labor rights. End Comment.
Palmer